Preface

The aim of this book is to bring up to date the research into Internet and gaming addiction so that it is possible to devise new methods to solve that problems that arise from prolonged and overuse of Internet-connected and other gaming devices. The essence of the problem is that the experience that result from Internet use show many of the same problems as other forms of addiction. Impaired relationships with family and friends, disturbed sleep patterns, reduce employment capability, among others, are common in all addictions. In fact that difference between a compulsion and addiction maybe simply be that the compulsions harm the individual, but addictions harm others also.

Is Internet Addiction Real?

Saying that people can be addicted to the Internet is like saying people can be addicted to the real world. The Internet, or Web is an environment, so people can only be addicted to aspects of the environment, such as bidding on eBay, as people are addicted to aspects of the real world, such as gambling at casinos. Some say that feelings of withdrawal from the Internet are evidence of Internet Addiction. Indeed in the study of so-called Internet addiction there are two clear camps. These include those who believe Internet addiction should be psychiatric disorder in its own right, and those which insists that Internet addiction sufferers are actually dependent on some rewarding aspect or function of behaviour associated with Internet use that could exist in the real world (Yellowlees & Marks, 2007). The latter of these is the camp I as the author fit into.

Some have argued that significant use of the Internet is more likely to be correlated co-morbidly with psychiatric condition (Ha et al., 2006), which might mean that so-called Internet addiction does not exist in its own right, but that the compulsive use of the Internet is more likely to be a way of resolving internal conflicts due to the inherent escapism associated with Internet use (Leung, 2003). It has been argued that Internet addiction is resistant to treatment and entails significant risks, with has high relapse rates (Block, 2008). This would suggest to me that Internet addiction is not a psychiatric condition as some suggest, because there is no such thing, as people simply have lifestyle choices, which may have once meant regularly watching the TV or reading a newspaper but now this and other media is consumed via the Internet (Bishop, 2014). This book is therefore essential for cutting through the various ideas around Internet addiction, and indeed gaming addiction, or more generally digital addiction.
Diagnostic Criteria in the Context of DSM-5

The first section of the book looks at the DSM-5 request for more research to be done on the Internet gaming disorder, providing some very interesting and important findings. The first chapter, by Mario Lehenbauer-Baum and Martina Fohringer, involved a survey of 577 people from German speaking areas, finding that any future classification of Internet gaming disorder should avoid using measures of tapping euphoria and cognitive salience. The next chapter in this section is by Halley M Pontes and Mark D Griffiths. This chapter devises the Internet Gaming Disorder Test (IGD-20) and the Internet Gaming Disorder Scale – Short Form (IGD9-SF). A similar diagnostic test devised by myself, is presented in Chapter III in this section, which presents results of a study in 1,828 young people. This scale is for digital addiction more generally, and not just gaming addiction. Both show the importance of reliable diagnostic scales, and as Halley Pontes and Mark Griffiths found, developing such scales are the first step towards unification and consensus in the field of gaming studies. This chapter by Mark Goode and myself shows that a checklist, similar to the IGD9-SF of Halley Pontes and Mark Griffiths, provides a reliable way of screening those who might show signs of problematic computer use.

Psychology and Behaviour Change

Section 2 opens with Chapter IV by Katharina Mittlböck, which looks at the worth and dangers of different role playing games. By focusing on understanding the role the psyche plays in motivations for entering a gaming space, the chapter finds that endangering the psyche of a player can result in chaos. The next chapter in the section, by Ashu MG Solo and myself, we look equally at the effect negative online behaviours can have on the well-being of users. It looks at a case study of a couple where one of them spends a lot of time online, affecting the relationship. It presents a framework, called the transitional flow of persuasion model, which can be used to help couples overcome those challenges from situations where one of the partners is suffering from digital addiction. It also shows how if such relationships are unlikely to work out, how it is possible to avoid a situation where retaliatory feedback from one of the couples adversely affects the others. The next chapter, by Daria Joanna Kuss, provides a qualitative account of how a minor fascination with the playing of Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) can result in addictive-like behaviours, such as the craving, tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms one might find in other addictive behaviours. The final chapter in this section by Mark Beech and myself looks at the nature in which rape-threats and language relating to stalking are manifested on Twitter, finding on the whole they are said in a joking or non-serious fashion. Exploring the narratives made by convicted troll, Isabella Sorley, it finds that trolls who send rape-threats, especially under the influence of alcohol, think it is funny. The chapter concludes therefore that before prosecuting someone for trolling, the nature of their other postings should be taken into account, and other aspects of their postings such as their biography and avatar, as not all postings are intended to harm.

Theory and Methods

Section 3 opens with Chapter VIII by Thomas Photiadis and Nicos Souleles, which presents a theoretical model based on a formula that combines three theoretical factors contributing to the process of designing 3D avatars. Building on the findings of the previous chapter it finds that these factors, namely aesthetics, user experience and psychology, puts forward new ideas on what informs the design process of 3D
avatars. This will likely affect the degree to which people find platforms seductive or addictive, and concludes that like all theoretical models, the one proposed needs to be tested further. The next chapter in this section, Chapter IX, extends this discussion of the seductive properties of online visual representations by looking at an objective means to derive definitions of computer jargon. Called ‘on-the-fly corpus linguistics,’ it took computer jargon definitions from the 1990s and early 2000s and those from the mid-2000s and 2010s as well as asking participants to put their own definitions. The study found that such an approach is unlikely to be effective on a small sample of laypersons as their definitions are likely to be different. It also finds the test is effective for discriminating between which definitional words should be applied to which term in determining how it is different from others. Following this chapter is Chapter X by Bahadir Bozoglan and Veysel Demirer. The chapter recognises that arguments concerning the association between excessive use and Internet addiction are ongoing, and that there has to date not been a clear, consensus definition of Internet addiction. Bahadir Bozoglan and Veysel Demirer discuss previous research and implications for future studies regarding Internet addiction and its most studied psychosocial variables, namely depression, loneliness, social anxiety, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social support. The final chapter in this section, by Jason Barratt and myself, looks at how those who use alcohol are more likely to use e-dating websites in a compulsive way, such as to overcome these. The study finds that those who consume alcohol are more likely to be abusive to others on websites, losing their discretion, such as when a person does not respond. The study found that men are more likely to contact women than the other way around, suggesting that e-dating might be a one way street.

Public Policy Issues

The first article in this section, Chapter XII, is by Shefali Virkar. Public policy is an important topic when trying to understand the effects of digital addiction, however it is termed. In this chapter Shefali Virkar looks at the stickiness of the UK Prime Minister’s petition website, finding that because the response to petitions is usually favoured towards the government and not the people, then the website loses its appeal in a way seductive websites that can promote addictive behaviours do not. Government 2.0 is not being realised Shefali Virkar argues, being somewhat unspectacular. The next chapter in this section, Chapter XIII, is by Wynford Compton and Mark Goode. The study looks at the importance issue of regulation of online gambling websites – through which the compulsive use of is more of a risk than traditional bricks-and-mortar establishments. Using the current literature to identify the behaviours of problem and pathological gamblers and the features that the online poker operators have in their software, a consumer survey was created, which showed that online poker consumers have a high rate of identified problem gambling behaviours compared to the publicised research of the gambling charities and that having accessed the responsible gambling information the consumers also had a high success rate at modifying them positively. Having such information available led to a higher level of social awareness when looking to the poker operators. Finally in this section, another chapter by Shefali Virkar considers digital addiction from the context of gamification and project design in public sector administration. The chapter investigates whether the day-to-day use of the new digital technologies in the public sector leads eventually to radical transformations in administrative functioning, policymaking, and the body politic, or merely to modest, unspectacular political and bureaucratic reform and to the emergence of technology-based, obsessive-compulsive pathologies and maladjusted Internet-based behaviours amongst individuals in society.
CONCLUSION

In this book I have used the term ‘digital addiction,’ whereas others have used gaming addiction and Internet addiction, reflected in the book’s title. The term digital addiction is preferable to Internet addiction as one cannot be addicted to the Internet as it is an environment. Someone who compulsively plays war games in a public house is not said to have pub addiction for instance. Digital addiction reflects the fact that a person is using digital technologies to manifest a need for compulsive behaviour. It might that when a traumatic memory resurfaces that the pleasure from playing video games acts as a form of self-medication to dampen down the anxiety. So digital addiction reflects the mode of compulsive behaviour in that if a person was not using digital technologies in an addictive manner they would use other ways of having dopamine stimulation, such as recreational drugs. The question that arises from this is that should Internet, gaming or digital addiction – whatever it is called – be seen as a better addiction to have than say gambling addiction, alcohol addiction, or drug addiction? Addictions like sex addiction and work addiction are seen as being more acceptable as they do not have as adverse an effect on society. It might be then that if it is impossible to treat the traumatic or other memories causing compulsive use of drugs, alcohol, etc. then maybe changing people from these addictions to gaming addiction could have beneficial outcomes for all?

It might be most appropriate therefore that in the creation of DSM-6 a condition called ‘Generalised Addiction Disorder’ is defined. This would, using the finds of Daria Joanna Kuss include characteristics like craving, tolerance and withdrawal symptoms. Having such a diagnosis would mean the divergent opinions in the community of scholars looking at problematic Internet and video game use would be reflected in a single diagnosis. Having a Generalised Addiction Disorder would also mean that compulsive use of any habit-forming stimulation could be treated as an addiction and therefore give the individual access to medical treatment.

REFERENCES


